

News Release



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California State Parks Steps Forward To Support Snowy Plover Recovery Plan Goals

SACRAMENTO – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public review and comment on a draft \$28.5 million recovery plan for the Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover, a small shorebird listed in 1993 as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The draft recovery plan describes the status, current management, recovery objectives and criteria, and specific actions needed to remove the western snowy plover from the List of Endangered and Threatened Species.

In California, coastal beach areas managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation provide important habitat for the snowy plover. State Parks manages more than 200 miles, or about 25 percent of California's coastline. Lands include State Beaches, State Parks, Natural Preserves and State Vehicular Recreation Areas. The role of these lands and the Department in providing for the recovery of the species is recognized in the recovery plan as vital.

"I want to assure the public and all interested parties that California State Parks is totally committed to working with USFWS in implementing the Snowy Plover Recovery Plan," said California State Parks Director Rusty Areias. "We will initiate innovative strategies to educate park visitors on the importance of this species and will continue to expand habitat management actions, in addition to implementing strict law enforcement protocols to ensure their protection. State Parks is dedicated to working with USFWS and other public and private partners to reestablish this species to a healthy number on the state's coastline."

Steve Thompson, acting manager for the California-Nevada Operations Office of the USFWS, said, "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service commends State Parks for recognizing the important role it can play in the recovery of this species, and the work they have done to date."

California State Parks staff has been working as team members in the drafting of the recovery plan for four years. In addition, State Parks has been actively implementing protection and restoration management actions in many areas of the State. Efforts focus on educating the public on the importance and sensitivity of the species. Monitoring plover activity on parklands, protecting nesting sites when

detected, including predator control, controlling visitor use and modifying operational activities that might disturb nesting birds. In many areas of the State, volunteer programs have been developed to assist with plover protection efforts.

Snowy plovers are small, pale-colored shorebirds with dark patches on either side of the upper breast. The coastal population numbers about 2,000 birds and breeds along the Pacific coast from southern Washington to southern Baja, California, Mexico. The breeding season extends from early March to late September.

Both eggs and nests are extremely difficult to see even at close range. Chicks leave the nest within hours of hatching, but cannot fly for about a month. Western snowy plovers are site-faithful nesters, returning to successful nesting sites year after year.

A small number of this shorebird are found at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (ODSVRA) in San Luis Obispo County, and have been a focus of an intense effort by State Parks to maximize both their survival and productivity. Under the direction of its Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, State Parks is utilizing experts in land use and wildlife as it continues its work to protect not only the threatened western snowy plover, but also the endangered California least tern which also nests on sands at ODSVRA.

The recovery plan proposes establishing working groups to assist in the development and implementation of management plans for each of the six recovery units that have been identified. Oceano Dunes SVRA is included in the unit that includes San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

Other recommended actions include monitoring and managing breeding habitat and wintering and migration areas in a systematic way to maximize survival and productivity; developing mechanisms for long-term management and protections of plovers and their habitat; undertaking scientific investigations to facilitate recovery efforts; and establishing an international conservation program with the Mexican government to protect snowy plovers and their habitats in Mexico.

Recovery plans provide a blueprint for actions by federal, state and other public agencies and private interests in the conservation of the endangered species and their ecosystems. Recovery plans do not obligate the expenditure of funds or require that actions be implemented. The USFWS estimates that recovering the western snowy plover will cost at least \$28.5 million.

Copies of the draft recovery plan are available for public review and comment through December 12, 2001 and may be obtained by contacting the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office at the following: Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, 2800 Cottage Way, W-2605, Sacramento, CA. 95825. The USFWS will hold eight public workshops on the draft recovery plan around the state beginning September 18 in Santa Barbara and concluding October 3 in Arcata.

The plan is also available at the following website: <http://www.rl.fws.gov>. Comments may be submitted electronically by sending them to the following address: fwlwsprp@fws.gov

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